

27-10
A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

TRURO, in *Cornwall*,

AT THE

FUNERAL of a YOUNG MAN,

WHO WAS

DROWNED,

As he was bathing, on SUNDAY, *June 3, 1753.*

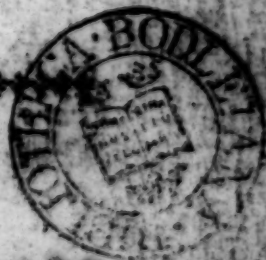
By SAMUEL WALKER, A. B.

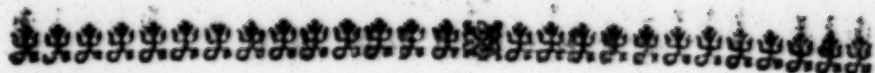
The SECOND EDITION.

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THE death of a young person, who was drowned on *Sunday* afternoon *June* 3d. as he was bathing in the River near this place, gave occasion to the following discourse the next day; and the prospect of it's being some how useful, in the opinion of those whose judgment I must prefer to my own, hath recommend it to the press. With a few slight alterations only, it is sent out, as it was preached. The candour of the reader will make allowance for the inaccuracies, which a discourse drawn up in haste must be liable to.

Truro, August 2. 1753.



I. SAMUEL, XX. 3.

There is but a Step between Me and Death.

***** YOU would be little apt to believe the Truth
Y of these Words; (the vanity of your hearts,
and the custom of being alive, do plead so
***** strongly to the contrary; so forward have
you been to count upon years before
you, or rather without reckoning upon the matter at all,
to sit down in your Sins and your heedlessness :) I say,
upon one account and another, you would not believe,
that *there is but a step between you and death*; did not
God give such striking proofs of the truth of it, that it
may not be denied *for the present*, altho' by and by it is
too likely to be forgotten. The melancholy occasion
which calls us together, is an instance in proof, that *there
is but a step indeed between us and death*. And, my
Brethren, while you have been amusing your thoughts
upon the history of this calamity, have told and heard,
over and over, with an earnest curiosity, the circumstan-
ces, which attended it, and made enquiry after the very
least particulars about it, devising one with another, how
the Person might have escaped, and have been prudently
determining upon more cautious measures with regard
to yourselves in prevention of a *like* mischief: while ye
have been thus busied in a search of no great consequence,
and been promising yourselves that it shall not thus
fall out to you, hugging yourselves in your own prudence
and so determining still upon many days to come; much
cause I have to fear, that very few of you have been hereby
called to fit and *practical* reflections upon *yourselves*, and
upon the uncertainty of your abidance on Earth.

BUT that you may not lose the benefit of such a Providence, and turn that which is designed to awaken and alarm you to self-enquiry and reformation, into a sort of a dream of curiosity and the talk of a day, till some new trifle disengages you from the thoughts of it, or it wears away being grown old upon your minds; I have judged it my duty, when God hath thus providentially called you together, to labour what I might, that his Providence might not be fruitless, and to direct your reflections into such a channel, that knowing *there is but a step between you and death*, you may instantly bethink you of your *eternal Interests*.

AND say, is there not somewhat inexpressibly *awful* in *sudden death*? To think of stepping into Eternity in a moment, of being gay and thoughtless, pleased with life, and unconcerned with any thing hereafter, in one hour, and before the next comes, to be snatched into the Eternal world, to be found in the region of spirits, to have an instant Judgment past, which shall never be reversed; this is *very awful* and indeed *terrible*; or, should the state be better, and the issue be glory; should a man be taken in a moment from a world of misery to a crown of life, yet still the very *importance* of *Eternity* would seem to require some more particular and express preparing and adorning of the Soul to launch into it. It is such an abyss this *Eternity*, so past thought the continuance, and so vast the misery and the happiness of it; that a man would not adventure into it without the fullest assurance, that all was well; and therefore, in submission to the Divine will, without a little space to *trim his lamp* however well it might be *supplied with oil*. But to have the Soul and the body separated in a moment, to be taken off without notice, and the summons and the execution to be the same instant; when

when death hath not been thought of till the very stroke comes, when life hath been the very joy of the heart, when pleasure hath home to that hour been the darling of the Soul, when G O D hath been forgotten, and all his works and ways cast aside and every religious thought put over to a future day (but which now alas ! shall never come ;) when C H R I S T the distributor of Glory, the procurer of mercy and the author of life, tho' the inexorable judge to those who disobey him, hath not been sought to ; when neither the *works of the Devil*, nor the *pomps and vanities of the world*, nor the *lustings of the flesh* have been mortified and renounced, nor the *Commandments of God* have been walked in ; in *such* circumstances, so unprepared, so destitute of all qualification for *Heaven*, just ripe (I cannot but tremble to speak it) just ripe for Hell, for the Vengeance of a God whose almighty arm cannot be avoided, the tyranny of tormenting Devils, and the society of desperate, hopeless, perished Souls, (Souls utterly perished in their inconceivable misery, while they lie in flames that will never be quenched :) thus to be taken away at once, without one thought, one cry for mercy, what on this side Damnation is so fearful ? And truly, when death takes away one from among us by a sudden stroke, we immediately feel the peculiar effect of it, immediately *there is a cry in the streets* ; the world flock together, with a painful, yet as it were unavoidable, anxiety and solicitude, look upon the corpse, and shudder, and go away amazed and confounded.

E V E N thus the most of *you* have done upon this sad occasion. Ye have seen those limbs, that a few hours ago were as strong, active, and full of life, as your own, all frozen and numbed ; that body which but a day since might not endure it's own heat and vigour, but needed the coolest

coolest refreshment, (alas that it was sought so unseasonably, so irreligiously!) Even that body ye have seen in the coldness of death; it now lies before you, and nothing remains, but this seasonable word of exhortation, e'er it be consigned to the grave and dust,

BUT have you beheld this with self-reflection? Hath it taught you, that *there is but a step between you and death*? Have you enquired, if you are not unfit to die, to be gone upon so sudden a call? And are you purposing thro' God's grace, to return instantly to God, and make sure work for your Soul while yet *there is a step between you and death*? Alas, Sirs, all besides this is to no purpose. Unless you are thus determined, this providence is perverted, and ye are this day alive in vain: Unless from this hour you take new courses, ye cannot be the better for what ye have seen, and the guilt of neglecting so loud and near a call will greatly add to the finfulness of your ways.

UNDER the grace of God, therefore, I shall endeavour to inforce upon you the practical influence of this Providence; and this

FIRST, by representing, that *there is but a step between you and death*, under various views, in which you may consider yourselves.

SECONDLY, by making an address suitable to the subject and the occasion.

FIRST I am to represent that *there is but a step between you and Death* under various views, in which you may consider yourselves. And here

If you consider the shortness of life upon the whole of it,
there

there is but a step between you and death. What is the life of man? All the resemblances, which can signify a thing vain and vanishing, the scriptures compare it to. The *substance* of life is compared to a *dream*; the *continuance* of it to a *watch in the night*; its *frailty* to *grass*; its *vanity* to a *shadow*; and its *remembrance* to that of *yesterday that is past*. It is every where represented by the likeness of the most vain, uncertain, frail, and fleeting things in the world. But what matters this? Or, what profits it that we take up such unmeaning words hereupon, as are hear'd from the mouths of the most thoughtless? "*Time is short,—We know not, to whose lot it may next fall,—All of us must die.*" Who speak not thus? And yet for the most part, with such stupidity and security, with so little serious consideration, as if tho' "*time be short,*" they were to abide here forever; as if, "*tho' none knows whose turn it may next be,*" yet he, who says it, were assured it should not be *his*; as if, "*tho' all of us must die,*" yet death were not worth thinking of. Away with this trifling I beseech you. Look forward to Eternity and meditate upon the immense ocean of Being which begins upon the moment of death; think at once of ten thousand ages; add to them as many millions more, as there are grains of sand on the shore, or drops of water in the sea; press forward your calculation till you are lost in the vast abyss, till your mind recoils; and finding it can gain no conception of the bottomless Eternity; sinks into wonder and silence; and quits the too great pursuit with this most evident reflection, that "*the life of man upon earth is not to be accounted of;*" and, in this respect, how little difference is there, whether you are green or old in life; whether your days be threescore years and ten or no more then twenty? In the view of Eternity, the *whole time* of man upon earth is very vanity. Away with your delusion then; and justly reckon; that *there is but*

a step between you and death, while ye consider Eternity. But this step may be shortened many ways ; wherefore,

"IF you are growing old, judge that there can be but a little step between you and death." Tell me, Fathers ; ye, whose heads are covered with honourable and hoary hairs ; ye, whose knees have learnt to tremble and hands to shake ; ye, who can but move from place to place, so weak and stiff are all your limbs ; ye, whose eyes fail and ears are become dull ; ye, who find decay grown upon you, and that you have been drawing towards death these many years, dying (as I may say) daily, and in a manner even now half dead, dead indeed to many of the active and useful purposes of life: say, is there any more than *a step between you and death*, even in comparison of the years you have *already lived*, and even should you be allowed to live out the age of man to the full ? Say that you shall reach to threescore and ten years, yet how *short* is the *step between you and death !*

"AND ye too who have felt the shock of diseases, the fever, the ague, and the consumption," judge that *there is but a step between you and death. Violence* is doing with you, what *time* is doing with the *aged*. Ye have been hard at death's door ; and with much cause you suspect, that disease will visit you again. Ye are not, what you were. Ye have lost your vigour. Ye cannot labour, as formerly. Ye dare not adventure into the dew of the night, or rain from above ; no more are ye strong to mingle wine in the feast, or hardy to endure the toil of manly recreation. View yourselves well ; your visage is pale, your flesh scarce cleaves to your bones, and every one, that sees you, reads the symptoms of Death in your countenance. Flatter yourselves no more : *there is but hardly a step between Death and you.*

N A Y

N A Y but "if you are young and strong," well you may judge, that *there is but a step between you and death*. True it is, you are well and brisk at present; life glows in your veins; and unhurt you can match all the labour which business or pleasure brings in your way. But shew me your grant from God, that none of those raging diseases, that lay a man in the dust in a week, shall fall upon you. Review the Tombs which lie without these doors; and tell me, if at least the half of those that fill them were not even as you, green and flourishing, and cut down however on a sudden. There lies your Brother, your Sister, your Friend, your well known acquaintance, whom death seized and took away in the vigour of life, amidst altogether as much probability and likelihood of living as *you* can boast. Did you not see them droop, and sicken, and die? Did you not follow them to the grave; and mourn a little for the loss you had suffered; and purpose for somewhat about your Soul, while you were thus feelingly taught, that there was *but a step between you and Death*.

H O W E V E R, suppose that none of these *plagues comes nigh your dwelling*: suppose, that you are healthy, young, and have hitherto escaped the disorders which have swept away others, and should still escape them: Yet the circumstance before us will sufficiently proclaim to you, that you cannot be safe, no not for an hour. I say therefore,

F I N A L L Y, "If you are not secure against the accidents which often snatch men away," you may reasonably judge that *there is but a step between you and death*. God hath his instruments of death prepared, and often he is pleased to send them out to destroy. Every element is a magazine of various
 B deaths

deaths at the Almighty disposal. When he Wills it, *the waters cover the slain*; and at his Command, the fire consumes the inhabitants of the world: When he bids, the air thundreth, the winds rage and destroy, and the lightnings strike dead in a moment: Upon his mighty summons, the whole earth trembles, and cities and provinces shake and fall. Nay, but if he pleases, the most harmless things become deadly; death meets us upon the voyage and the journey, takes us at our amusements, and prevents us at our labour. In such a variety of ways the sudden stroke comes, that we are never secure. In an experience of but few years, we can recollect, and see a large catalogue of sudden deaths, and this from things the most unsuspected. No where there is security. Our provisions sometimes choak us, and our houses sometimes fall upon us; one while the animals designed for our convenience, become the instruments of death to us; and another while we wash in the streams and are no more; now the mad Rioter kills us in his rage, and now the heedless companion hath wounded us in the hunting. And what may be observed with regard to all these sudden instances of death is, that the healthy and strong are mostly in the way of them, and that thro' the hardiness of vigour ordinarily they come upon us. Put all this together now, these sudden and unimagined ways of death; and then say, however lusty, and young, and in health you are at present, whether you have not cause to say with young *David*, who had with his own hand slain the Lion and Bear, and with his sling and his stone felled the great *Goliath*, *There is but a step between me and death.*

U P O N the whole then, we must of force come to this conclusion, which the *Text* speaks, and every one

one of us may take up his word and say, *There is but a step between me and death*: And if this comes home to us with a convincing weight, from a review, whether of the shortness of life in general, or of the particular circumstances we are in, or the many destructive calamities we are liable to; I would hope that you are now more prepared for the

SECOND thing I was to attempt, which was by a suitable address, to gain upon you (if I might) some good improvement of this providence.

AND if death be so near, *but a step* from you, I will ask, How are you prepared for it? In what state doth it find you?

I. DO TH it find you among those hardened and most senseless wretches, who have *never* once seriously *thought of dying*, never taken so much as one step to meet it, have not been put out of the road of their pleasures, lusts and interests, no not by all *the terrors of the Lord*, nor by all his gracious invitations, nor by all the intreaties of God's servants, nor by all the calls of his providence? I must speak plainly to you. You do not believe any thing of this whole matter. You have heard of Heaven and Hell, and a Judgment to come; but in truth you *believe* nothing about them. You believe them not, as you do any other thing, of which you are told; as suppose, that there was such a place as *Jerusalem*, or there is such a country as *China*. The *suspicion* of such eternal things doth indeed float upon your minds; you had early notions of them put into you; you take them up as the common opinion; but, while you live as you do, in reality you believe them not. For is it possible you should be fully persuaded in your

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mind

mind; that there is such a state as Heaven, a state of glory and blessedness, where Peace, and Love, where Joy and security, beyond the biggest wish of man's heart, are eternally to be found: or again, that Hell is a state of most horrible and endless wretchedness; and withal, that a judgement-day is coming, wherein while the world is dissolving in flames, and the great Judge sits to determine the eternal conditions of men, such as you are this day, shall be called out trembling and confounded to receive that awful and terrible sentence, *Go ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his Angels*: Is it possible, that you should be persuaded of the truth of all this, and at the same time, that you know, *Death is but a step off*, yet live in the manner you do, with all the curses of God lying upon your head? It cannot be. But, at least, give yourself the pain to think about it one hour; and if I might prevail with you so far, let it be the very hour after you are dismissed from hence. Go home, and consider, if there be not in reality such awful wondrous things, and that *there is but a step between them and you*. But be sure, you take the thought of Death home with you, when you set yourself down to make the enquiry. O, what a scene of terror and danger would one serious hour open upon you!

2. I F Death, *but a step off*, doth not find you among those, who have been *always careless*; doth it find you *asleep again*, when you had been *once awakened*? If you made *some steps* in Religion; roused as you were; if you ridded your hands of sinful courses *for a season*; if you sought to know God's will *a little*, and ran *a while* in the way of his Commandments, if after all you fell away, and are now a stranger to GOD and the

the Lord JESUS CHRIST; if you do no more entertain God in your thoughts, nor devoutly call on him when you lie down and when you rise up, nor chuse to hear of him in your familiar discourses: If you are one of those, who having put their hand to the Plow are looking back; I shall need say nothing to you; your Consciences are this moment accusing you more than any words of mine can do; you know not how to hold up your heads; you dare not look Death in the face; you are all amazement, while you consider, that *there is but a step between Death and you,*

ESPECIALLY you, who are younger; lend me your Ear. Look, I entreat you, upon this Coffin. Death is not perhaps so far off from you, as you may think. Know you, that the next day you may be in the same place, and by a like calamity. What mean you thus to trifle; to deny your God for vain Companions and idle Pleasures, for mere sloth and indolence? O return unto the LORD your God from this instant, if you would not dye as ye now are: and I appeal to yourselves, you would not for ten thousand worlds. This departed Youth calls upon and warns you. He speaks not indeed with his voice; no, you shall hear, nor see him no more: but he speaks more feelingly, than if he could call upon you by ten thousand voices; his language enters into your very Souls. He bids you, "O my Companions, and Fellows, and all you of the like
 " age with me, look upon me; look upon me, not
 " with an usefess pity, but to learn that you must dye;
 " yea, come and see what is your portion. I can do no
 " other service, than to warn you, that you *remember*
 " *your Creator*. And by all the circumstances about
 " me which may tend to move you; by the cold
 Corpse

" Corpse I now am ; by the Coffin, in which I lye
 " before you ; by all the Reverence, which Death gives
 " me ; my charge and summons is, Return unto the
 " LORD your GOD, and delay not, lest by to-morrow
 " you are even as I am, who have a new habitation
 " and dwelling, even the lonely little grave. "

3. DEATH, *a step off from you*, doth it find you in the
 practice of any known sin? You may amuse yourself
 with conceits, " that it is *well enough* with your Soul,
 " that God is a *Merciful* God, that you are not as
 " many others, that what you do is not so very faulty
 " *neither*, that tis but a *little* offence, and that in other
 " respects none can blame you." This may pass when
 death is away, and you may go on with some kind
 of security and quiet: but I pray you, can you stand
 the sight of death? Will your excuses hold with you,
 when you see death *but a step* from you? Possibly
another day you will be ready to tell me, that you see
no harm in idle company and sitting over the glass;
 that all the strictness, I have often pressed you to, is *too*
much and needless; that *the gate* of Heaven is not
 so *strait*, as *some* would make it; that *one*, upon the
 whole such as you are, altho' there be one thing or
 another in your course which you cannot altogether
 approve, need not *fear*: this you may tell me *another day*.
 But how say you *now*? How say you, when death stands
 before you, but just *a step* from you? Would you not
 that your state were rather otherwise than it is? My
 brethren, ye may make light of jesting and com-
 pany-keeping, and squandering your precious time;
 you may count it a small matter, whether you spend
 your Sundays at Church and in your families, or in
 visitings and walkings. But *death* speaks another language:
 and

and I will hope, thro' God's grace; so do *your consciences* too at *this time*. I mentioned the *Sabbath*; and the day and time, when the calamity, which gives occasion to this address, befall the person before us, would not suffer that I should omit giving you warning in that particular. Brethren, God will have us know, that the *Sabbath* is an *Holy Day*, and that the employment of it is neither business nor vanity, neither pleasure nor recreation. And when death is at hand; a man shall assuredly own, that such breaches of the *Sabbath* are not among the least of the sins, which lie heavy upon him. But

LASTLY, That *there is but a step between death and you*, have you been so advised in, that you have been preparing for it? Have you made familiar to you what lies beyond the grave? Been devoutly endeavouring whatever pains, damage, or self-denial it might cost you, to gain a sure and clear interest in the Lord JESUS; and consequently, in the Eternal Glory and Happiness purchased by him? Yet the thought of sudden death may serve to *quicken* you; and if you were to depart this night or the morrow, you would wish to be more advanced than you are. Ye shall do well then to bring death near to you, to view it in all its consequences, and to consider how instantly it may be with you: Then you shall be able more evidently to discover your corruptions, and the striving of the law of sin, and the poverty of your graces; too apt to be hid by the deceitfulness of your hearts. It shall put a certain edge and importunity into all you do, shall raise you yet higher above the World and the uncertain things of it, and lift up your desires and hopes with greater earnestness to the *Heavenly Inheritance of the Saints*

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in Light. But in all this, I shall have no doubt, *you* have prevented me: And therefore shall be content to add but this one word to you, that if there be *but a step between you and death*, you may well suffer God's corrections in this life, bear quietly the opposition of men, and boldly encounter the assaults of the Devil, World and Flesh, for so short a space; patiently waiting till God deliver you.

AND now, my brethren, I have done: Only wishing you, not to consider what you have heard (as is too common on these occasions,) as a piece of form; and this my labour, as a sort of decent compliment to the person dead. Be assured, that I have not meant *him* but *you*, in the whole matter: Otherwise I had spared both *you* and *myself* this labour. Remember then, that you are this day warned by the Providence of God, by his own Word, and exhorted by me his unworthy Minister, that *there is but a step between you and death*. And beware, how ye disregard so manifold a summons, as ye must answer for it one day. May GOD bless, what we have heard, unto us, for JESUS CHRIST's sake!

F I N I S.

